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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN DIPLOMAT WARNS ARMENIA AGAINST "ELECTION
REVOLUTION"

Classified By: Poloff Masha Herbst for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) A Russian diplomat delivered a strong anti-Western message at the Wilton Park Conference in Yerevan November 7. While discussing Russia's foreign policy vis a vis each of the South Caucasus countries, he praised Azerbaijani "independence," blasted Georgian nationalism, and warned Armenia against a "color" revolution during the upcoming elections. Kelin's neo-colonialist remarks were received with much skepticism here, but should serve as a caution to any in attendance who might have thought Russia a benign regional power. This cable is classified in deference to conference rules that all discussion be off the record. END SUMMARY

ON THE UNITED STATES

¶2. (C) Andrei Kelin, the director of the Russian MFA's South Caucasus department, told conference participants that while the U.S. and Russia weren't exactly fighting in the South Caucasus, they have different interests. He mentioned the United States' distance from the region, and said obliquely that he was not certain it was "suitable for every country in the world to promote democracy." He said the best policy was a mixture of eastern and western approaches. "Unconditional pro-Western orientation gives only harm to people, economics, and relationships with neighbors," Kelin said.

ON ARMENIA

¶3. (C) Kelin painted his country as Armenia's earnest benefactor, saying Russia was doing its best to help the GOAM negotiate peacefully with Turkey and Azerbaijan. He said that, while the GOR didn't have much influence in either situation, it would continue its efforts. That said, Kelin turned to the upcoming elections, clearly a more ominous topic in his mind. "When you have a democratic society and an opposition that is strong, it is always a troubled period," he said. Kelin said pointedly that Russia hoped Armenia would "not go through a revolution in elections," and that he did not believe a revolution would contribute to the country's stability and prosperity.

ON GEORGIA

14. (C) Kelin told conference participants somewhat derisively that Georgia's current policy was rooted in nationalism and a "pro-Western orientation." He said Russia observed that Georgia's primary goal was to reintegrate South Ossetia and Abkhazia by means of "alienation of Russia." Kelin said Russia had no choice but to pursue a "hard line" with Georgia, and mentioned during the question and answer period that, while Russia was currently "very far" from imposing sanctions on Georgia, the Russian parliament was drafting legislation that would create just such a mechanism. Kelin claimed there had been an exponential increase in Georgian military spending, but his figures were rebutted by a Tbilisi-based British diplomat who said Kelin's figures were very exaggerated.

ON AZERBAIJAN

15. (C) Kelin took a positive view of Azerbaijan's economic and political potential. He lauded what he called President Ilham Aliyev's "strong authority" in Azerbaijan, and said the country has good potential if it continues its "independent policy."
GODFREY